



**INDIANA FIRE CHIEFS
ASSOCIATION**

Dealing with Difficult People

2008

Fire Chiefs Orientation Seminar Sponsored in Cooperation with the Indiana Firefighter Training System.



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Objectives

Understand some basic fundamentals of effective communication with difficult people.



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Where will you find difficult people?

- Your Community
- Elected / Appointed Officials
- Personnel

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Your Community

- Does your community know your department?
 - Prevention / Education Programs
 - Community Events
 - Fish Fries, Chili Supper, Breakfast, etc.
 - Open Houses
 - Use the media as a communication resource
 - Don't miss opportunities to interact with your community

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Concerned Citizens



- "Your firefighters were driving too fast"
- "What took you so long to get here"
- "The ambulance bill is too expensive"
- "The fire department spends too much money"
- "Why do you have to use the sirens at night"

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Opportunity

- Is the customer always right?
 - No, but they don't have to feel wrong

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Opportunity

- Listen
- Call them back
- Provide information
- Be honest, even when they don't like it
- Recognize what you can't fix and move on

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Elected / Appointed Officials

Opportunities for Difficulties

- Budget Cuts
- Purchasing & Unnecessary Spending
- Staffing Challenges
- Benefit Negotiations
- Policy Making

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Elected / Appointed Officials

- Build Relationships
- Educate and Involve
- Provide information
- Help them be successful
- Protect their reputation

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Elected / Appointed Officials

High Risk Opportunities

- Public Meetings
 - Don't "win the battle and lose the war"
- The "Us and Them" trap
- Expressing your opinion

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Difficult Personnel

Contributing Factors

- Personal agendas
- Reaction to change
- Revenge
- Jealousy
- Hurt feelings
- Lack of confidence
- Loss of control
- Lack of involvement / information



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Basic Tools

- Know your people
- Policies and Procedures
 - Communicated and Practiced
- Formal Coaching and Teaching Process
- Progressive Discipline
 - Understood, Fair and Consistent

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Difficult Personnel

What is the culture / environment at your fire department?

Who creates the culture / environment at your fire department?

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Difficult Personnel

- Creating a respectful environment will limit difficult behavior

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Respect

- Recognizing differences between self and others;
- Conveying information to others through words and actions that they are appreciated;
- Awareness of how actions may be interpreted as disrespectful.

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The Law Says Show Respect

- ◆ Discrimination based on race, sex, age, disability, religion or national origin is against the law.
 - ◆ Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1991
 - ◆ The Age Discrimination in Employment Act
 - ◆ Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) Executive Orders
 - ◆ The Equal Pay Act of 1963
 - ◆ The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

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Sexual Harassment

- ◆ Quid Pro Quo"
 - ◆ Submission to conduct, either explicit or implicit, as a condition of employment
 - ◆ Rejection or submission to conduct is used as a basis for employment decisions
 - ◆ Examples in the Fire Service

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Sexual Harassment

- ◆ Hostile Work Environment
 - ◆ Comments
 - ◆ Touching
 - ◆ Cartoons
 - ◆ "Lewding"
 - ◆ Gossip
 - ◆ Nicknames
 - ◆ Jokes
 - ◆ Too much information

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Hostile Work Environment

- "Severe"
- "Pervasive"
- Generally a single act or involving a single individual
- Slow Spreading
- Most Dangerous

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Group Discussion

- Laws favor employees
- "Reasonable Person"
- Can I tell you something in confidence?
- The "in writing" fallacy
- Retaliatory Actions in the future
- Comfort Levels

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Yea, but you know what a fire station is like....

- Magazines
- T.V. / Movies / Video Games
- Table Talk
- Word Choices
- Telephone Conversations
- Internet Usage

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Leadership's Role

- Walk the walk.
- The act of not stopping inappropriate behavior condones inappropriate behavior.

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Expectations

- Educate.
- When it happens, make it stop.
- Be proactive, not reactive
- Nothing causes more exposure for a leader than disrespect in the workplace-serious issue.
- Follow-up and confidentiality are critical.

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Questions / Discussion

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